

FATALGRAM

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Date of Accident: February 17, 2010

General

On February 17, 2010, an employee was clearing brush along a power line right of way in a Hydro-Ax when the machine broke through ice and the cab was submerged underwater. The victim was unable to escape the cab and a co-worker was unable to open the cab from the outside. The victim drowned.

Description of Accident:

The victim, an equipment operator, was in the process of clearing brush along the power line right of way when he drove across hidden ice. The 38,000 lb Hydro-Ax broke through the ice submerging the cab.

The accident site was approximately 1.5 miles from the highway and only accessible by helicopter or off-road vehicles.

Alaska Occupational Safety and Health investigated the accident. Based on the investigation, it appears the victim drove the Hydro-Ax southbound along the right of way clearing brush while heading towards the highway. The Hydro-Ax crossed a pond hidden under the snow where it broke through ice that was approximately 13 inches thick. A co-worker in the area was unable to rescue the victim. A professional dive team was called in when EMS could not rescue the victim. Ice prevented both doors from being opened. The side windows were covered with a wire mesh to protect them from flying debris and the windshield was made of a shatter resistant Lexan.

The emergency exit windows were checked after the accident and found to be in operable condition.

Accident Prevention Recommendations:

- Ensure that equipment operators are trained in proper safety and operating procedures. Special hazard considerations and procedures should be considered for off-road operation, particularly when hazards such as water are hidden under snow and ice. Some procedures for consideration during winter operations are:
 - Potential hazardous zones should be identified using available resources and satellite imagery such as Google Earth.
 - A job hazard analysis should be performed prior to the start of each job.
 - Operators should be trained on and familiar with emergency escape procedures.
 - Do not make modifications to equipment without the manufacturer's written approval.
- Inspect equipment daily to ensure all systems are functioning properly.
- Ensure that written safety procedures and policies are followed.